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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 000519

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [YM](#) [DOMESTIC](#) [POLITICS](#)

SUBJECT: ISLAH PARTY MODERATE WARNS ABOUT DEMONSTRATIONS;  
DISCUSSES ELECTIONS

REF: SANAA 263

Classified By: Pol/Econ Deputy Chief Catherine J. Westley for Reasons 1  
.5 (b,d)

1. (C) Summary: Islah party political director Mohamed Qahtan expressed concern that an onset of war in Iraq would endanger Americans in Sanaa because increased demonstrations may spiral out of the government's control. P/E DepChief met with him on March 17 at his request. Qahtan, a well-known moderate, requested the meeting to discuss his concerns about demonstrations and whether the April 27 parliamentary elections will be postponed. Party election preparations and the case of Sheikh Mohammed Ali al-Moayed were also discussed (septel). End Summary.

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Concern about Demonstrations  
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2. (C) Qahtan expressed concern that the government-sponsored demonstrations could spiral out of control with the onset of war in Iraq. He wanted to warn the Embassy to be extra careful as he did not have great confidence that all demonstrations would be controlled well by the security forces. Qahtan also said he thinks "Saddam should go now" and that the "Iraqi people have suffered enough."

3, (C) P/E DepChief brought up the Islah party leadership's comments at the government-sponsored demonstration held on March 15. Islah party leader Sheikh al-Ahmar and Islah party Shura Council Chairman and leader of the fundamentalist faction Sheikh al-Zindani were both quoted in press reports as calling for jihad against Americans should a war begin against Iraq. P/E DepChief said that comments like that put Americans and the Embassy in danger and were crossing the line. Qahtan said he had written a column negating those comments that was not published. He offered to apologize on behalf of the party, but said he cannot really speak for all factions. (Comment: Zindani leads the fundamentalist faction, Qahtan is one of the moderates. End Comment). He said that President Saleh had co-opted al-Zindani starting with his forced participation on the Code of Conduct committee (ref), and tried to place part of the blame for al-Zindani's comments on the government for allowing and perhaps encouraging them. He did not address Sheikh al-Ahmar's comments.

4. (C) Post learned from the United Nations Security Chief in Sanaa that the March 15 demonstration had to be dispersed by gunfire in the air by security forces after some unruly youths tried to climb a police truck with a machine gun mounted upon it. This information was not confirmed by the RSO with the Ministry of Interior. The MOI said the dispersal by gunfire was to stop stone throwers from getting out of hand. No one was injured or killed.

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Elections Could be Postponed; Party Preparations  
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5. (C) Qahtan said that he hears rumors constantly about a possible postponement of the April 27 elections if an Iraq war starts, but does not have any concrete information. He indicated that he hoped there would not be any delay. P/E DepChief said that we encourage the elections to go forward.

6. (C) Qahtan said election preparations are continuing between the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) and within Islah. Approximately 65 constituencies are already agreed between Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) and Islah in terms of which party's candidate runs in which constituency. These are primarily in Aden, Taiz and Sanaa. As of March 16, 8 constituencies of the regions already discussed remain unresolved. Discussions are ongoing, and Qahtan characterizes them as constructive. He did not give an exact number of seats where YSP women are running for the JMP, but said there were several.

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Comment  
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7. (C) Post will continue to monitor demonstrations closely

and disseminate information on their scope and location to the American community to ensure their safety. It is doubtful that the comments made by certain Islah party members regarding jihad or containing other inflammatory language will end. The Islah party in particular will try to use the Iraq war and U.S.-Yemeni counterterrorism cooperation to discredit the governing General People's Congress (GPC) in the election campaign. End Comment  
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